

PROPOSED FORM

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OF

REGISTER FOR BAPTISMS.



L O N D O N :

PRINTED BY AND FOR J. NICHOLS;
SOLD ALSO BY MR. COLLINS AT SALISBURY.

M DCC LXXXI.

PROPOSED FORM

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REGISTER FOR BAPTISTS

P R E F A C E.

IT is unnecessary to dwell upon the utility of making proper entries in parish registers, as well as carefully attending to the preservation of them.

This most wise and beneficial regulation is said to have been first introduced in the year 1538, by the direction of Cromwell, then vicar-general; before which time, probably, the parochial clergy were not often sufficient penmen to keep such registers, nor were there at this period excisemen who could be employed as amanuenses.

The great convenience arising from this ordinance of Cromwell's, occasioned its being further enjoined during the reigns of Edward VI. Q. Elizabeth, and James I.

I take this from bishop Gibson's Codex, though in Sparrow's Collection of Injunctions, printed in 1684, 4to. I do not find any mention of this regulation during the reign of Q. Elizabeth. The keeping, however, a register was enjoined by Edward VI. A. D. 1547; and for neglect in so doing, the minister is mulcted 3s. and 4d. to the poors box, whilst in the same year it makes one of Cranmer's articles of visitation to the province of Canterbury. Lastly, a canon of 1603 directs registers to be made up from *the law's first taking place*, i. e. A. D. 1538, and more particularly so from the first year of Q. Elizabeth, which last injunction seems to shew, that before that period they were either neglected, or slovenly kept.

The civil wars during the next reign often prevented the parish ministers from executing regularly this part of their duty, which seems also to have been greatly neglected during the Commonwealth; though in the year 1653 an ordinance passed, directing, that the parishioners, contributing to the relief of the poor,

should provide a book of velum or parchment, which was to be kept by a person chosen by the said parishioners every three years, and who was to make the proper entries of marriages, births, and burials.

Upon the Restoration, registers seem to have been again attended to, and possibly by the injunctions of the bishops at their visitations.

During the reign of K. William, the first parliamentary notice is taken of them; though the object of the legislature is not to encourage this most useful evidence, but to raise supplies for carrying on the war with France.

By 6 and 7 Will. III. c. 6. S. xxiv. every clergyman is to keep a register of births, burials, and baptisms, under a penalty of 100*l*.

By 7 and 8 Will. III. c. 35. S. v. every parent is to give notice of the birth of their child within five days, under a penalty of 40*s*. and the same penalty is extended to the parish minister, for not making an entry of the child thus born and not christened.

Lastly, by 4 Anne, c. 12. S. x. the clergyman is indemnified from the penalty of 100*l*. imposed by 6 and 7 Will. III. in case the duties upon christenings, births, and burials, shall have been really paid.

Notwithstanding, however, these different injunctions from the time of Henry VIII. parish registers are not yet kept as they should be, which seems to arise from the following causes.

The form of the book for this purpose hath hitherto been generally not above four inches wide, in which there were no proper columns for separating the entries as to births, marriages, and burials: besides which, the book was often paged with parchment, on which material few can write distinctly.

The next objection to this same book was, that it contained too many leaves, so that it was worn, or much thumbed and effaced, before it was written out*.

* When the register is in this condition, a fair copy should be transcribed at the expence of the parish, which should be properly attested by the minister and churchwardens. The original, however, should be preserved as long as it will hang together, or is at all legible.

It is supposed, that the present form of a register will not be liable to any of these defects, as the pages are considerably wider, and the material good paper for writing; nor will it consist of more than 100 pages, whilst there are different books for births and burials*, from want of which separation great confusion in the entries hath frequently been occasioned.

As this register must necessarily fall into the hands of the parochial clergy, it may not be improper to add a few hints with regard to church-yards, the care of which seems to be little attended to, either by the bishops or archdeacons in their visitations; or at least the necessary injunctions (if given) are seldom carried into proper execution.

The first, and perhaps principal use of this inclosure is for burials†; but the soil is so covered with weeds, and more especially the new-raised graves, that the tomb-stone often cannot be approached, much less can the inscription be read.

This arises, first, from the mould being raised in a hillock, which occupied the space where the coffin is deposited, and which is left to be covered by the seeds of every weed that may be waisted that way. Whereas the turf, taken off for digging the grave, should be replaced as it grew before, and the soil, before raised into a hillock, should be scattered equally over the other parts of the church-yard, which may want manure.

It may be said, indeed, that in a course of years the coffin will rot, and the surface over it consequently fall in. But how easy is it, when this happens, to bring the proper quantity of earth from new graves, or from the neighbouring fields!

Another cause of the church-yard being thus covered with weeds, is occasioned by the clergyman's horse or cow being fed there, which do not bite the grass sufficiently close, whilst, besides this objection, they tread the graves in by their weight, and often soon after the corpse is interred. The church-yard, therefore, should only be depastured by sheep, which would soon make

* For large parishes, it will be very easy to add any number of pages which may be required. As for marriages, a proper book for entering them is already published; and soon after the marriage-act took place.

† It is said, that an act hath lately passed in Ireland, which most wisely prohibits burials within the body of the church.

the herbage a fine turf, whilst the coffins would long resist the weight of their bodies.

A third cause of the church-yards being in this slovenly condition, is the want of a proper height and sufficient repair in the wall of the inclosure, so that the heavy beasts of others often break in.

These neglects, with regard to a more decent state of the church-yard, it is imagined, may be remedied by the bishops and archdeacons in the visitations of their diocese; but the additional proposals of improvement are perhaps more proper for the clergyman and more substantial inhabitants of the parish.

There should be, for the health and rational amusement of the parishioners, a dry walk all round the verge of the church-yard, and, if there is no porch to the church, there should be a seat for the aged and infirm. The paths also to the church from every hamlet should be made good, and, where stiles are necessary, commodious ones should be provided at the expence of the parish. The young and strong may laugh possibly at this proposal; but this convenience, to be procured at so small a charge, is highly necessary for the invalid, or more advanced in years.

It is hoped, that the clergyman of every parish will, at the end of each year, cast up the baptisms and burials, from which it will appear, whether the inhabitants increase or decrease. From many inquiries, indeed, made in different parts of the kingdom, it may be pronounced, that there is no foundation for the melancholy apprehensions of many writers on this head.

It hath been thought right to leave six pages at the end, two of which are for an alphabetical index*, to facilitate searches; and the other four for any parochial event, of which it may not perhaps be improper to give some specimens.

“ On ——— of this year, the spire of the church was struck by lightning, and it was most completely repaired by the munificence of A. B. lord of the manor ———.”

“ Wheat was so cheap during the present year, that it sold for — shillings per bushel.”

* This not only facilitates searches, but may often prevent the article inquired after from being passed over.

“ So great a flood happened on ———, that the water reached to ———; and, for want of a graduated post according to act of parliament, A. B. was drowned in passing the ford at ———.”

“ This year all the roads of the parish were thoroughly mended, so as to be very good for carriages, under the direction of B. C. who for several years had taken upon himself the trouble of being surveyor, in order to accomplish this necessary work.”

“ On ——— was buried A. B. of this parish, who by the register appears to have been 103 years of age. He now died by ——— accident ———.”

“ On ——— was buried C. D. of this parish, who by the same wife had 17 children, all of which are now alive.”

“ ——— This year the wall of the parish church-yard was thoroughly repaired.”

“ The bishop of the diocese confirmed in the parish church on ——— 400 persons of both sexes; which exceeds the number of the last confirmation by ———.”

“ This year a sickness prevailed in the parish, which occasioned ——— burials within a fortnight.”

“ A frost continued from ——— to ———. The thermometer, &c.”

Such or like memoranda will in time, perhaps, become considerably interesting to the parishioners of the succeeding century, whilst the making the entry cannot be considered as troublesome, even by the most indolent.

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F I N I S.

THE
HISTORICAL
RECORDS
OF THE
CITY OF
NEW YORK
FROM
1625 TO
1898

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